

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSM-03 SY-05 MCT-01 USSS-00
HA-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00
ICAE-00 INRE-00 IO-13 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03
PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 /076 W
-----053516 141521Z /46

O R 141454Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8373
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 3413

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, SY, LE
SUBJECT: FRANGIEH ASSASSINATION

1. PRESIDENT AL-ASSAD DEMONSTRATED HIS GRAVITY AND CONCERN OVER THE NEWS OF TONY FRANGIEH'S ASSASSINATION BY PULLING FONMIN KHADDAM OUT OF A MEETING WITH PDRY FONMIN AND DISPATCHING HIM DIRECTLY TO ZGHORTA. MFA OFFICIAL TOLD CHARGE THAT KHADDAM WAS NOT EVEN GIVEN A CHANCE TO APOLOGIZE TO THE PDRY MINISTER FOR CUTTING OFF THEIR TALKS AND CANCELING A DINNER IN THE MINISTER'S HONOR. THE PRESIDENT ALSO SENT HIS BROTHER RIF'AT TO EXTEND CONDOLENCES AND ASSISTANCE TO THE FRANGIEH'S.

2. MFA DIVISION DIRECTOR SIAGE TOLD US OF HIS ANGER AND FRUSTRATION ON HEARING THE NEWS. WHENEVER THERE IS A GLIMMER OF HOPE IN LEBANON, AS THERE HAS BEEN IN RECENT WEEKS, ELEMENTS WHICH SEEK TO DIVIDE LEBANON AND DISCREDIT SYRIA
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MANUFACTURE A CRISIS. SIAGE CLAIMED SYRIA WOULD NOT FALL INTO THE TRAP BY LASHING OUT BLINDLY AND WOULD NOT BE DETERRED FROM SEEKING STABILITY. HE CLAIMED SYRIA KNOWS HOW TO TAKE CARE OF INDIVIDUALS WHO WORK AGAINST THE UNITY OF LEBANON AND WILL DO SO.

3. SIAGE, LIKE MANY OTHERS HERE, BELIEVES THAT SYRIA, AS

MUCH AS TONY FRANGIEH, WAS THE TARGET OF THE KATAEB ATTACK. THE OBJECTIVE, IN ADDITION TO AVENGING DEATH OF SLAIN KATAEB LEADER, IS THOUGHT TO HAVE BEEN TO FORCE SYRIAN ADF TO TAKE THE SIDE OF THE FRANGIEH'S AGAINST THE KATAEB AND

SHAYKH PIERRE GEMAYEL. THIS ACTION, AS NEWSMAN RAFIQ ATASSI POINTED OUT TO US, WOULD 1) DISCREDIT FRANGIEH IN THE EYES OF MOST CHRISTIANS, 2) STRENGTHEN THE KATAEB'S RECRUITMENT EFFORTS, AND 3) FORCE MORE MODERATE VOICES WITHIN THE KATAEB TO ADOPT THE STAUNCHLY ANTI-SYRIAN AND POSSIBLY PRO-PARTITION VIEWS OF BASHIR GEMAYEL AND CAMILLE CHAMOUN.

4. ASSAD, KHADDAM, AND ASSAD'S BROTHER RIF'AT HAVE ALL HAD CLOSE PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE FRANGIEH FAMILY. IT IS GOING TO BE DIFFICULT FOR THEM TO IGNORE AN APPEAL BY A GRIEF RIDDEN SULEIMAN FRANGIEH FOR REVENGE. IN ADDITION, SYRIA IS INDEBTED TO FRANGIEH FOR HIS RECONCILIATION WITH KARAME, HIS BREAK WITH THE LEBANESE FRONT, AND HIS STAUNCH REJECTION OF TIES WITH ISRAEL.

5. THE BEST INTERESTS OF SYRIA ARGUE AGAINST GRATIFYING FRANGIEH'S PERSONAL FRUSTRATION AND GRIEF THROUGH OVERT SUPPORT FOR A WAR OF REVENGE AGAINST THE KATAEB. NEVERTHELESS, SYRIA CAN BE EXPECTED, UNDER THE COVER OF ITS ROLE AS LEBANON'S POLICEMAN, TO PROTECT FRANGIEH AND TO TRY TO SUPPRESS OR ELIMINATE KATAEB HOTHEADS. THE TRICK FOR CONFIDENTIAL

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SYRIA WILL BE TO DISCHARGE ITS DEBT TO FRANGIEH WITHOUT FURTHER UNITING LEBANON'S CHRISTIANS AGAINST THE SYRIAN ROLE.

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